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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the first six months of activities and accomplishments of Commonwealth Futures, an initiative designed to provide services to at-risk youth in Massachusetts schools. Major activities are outlined chronologically, implementation problems and successes are briefly discussed, and projected future activities are listed. These outcomes were identified: (1) an interagency Steering Committee and Work Group were established to advise and assist the project; (2) 24 communities were identified and invited to participate in a conference and program application process; (3) six communities were selected to attend an Institute and begin a comprehensive local planning process; (4) an interagency RFP/Comprehensive Plan format was developed; and (5) initial local planning was completed, resulting in the submission of comprehensive community plans which will be funded with $495,000 in reallocated State funds beginning January 1, 1987. The report concluded that Commonwealth Futures shows promise of being an ideal vehicle for developing new levels of interagency coordination and cooperation. On the local level, Futures has raised awareness of the dropout issue and has encouraged development of communication between communities. (KH)

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FINAL REPORT

July 1 - December 31, 1986

The goal of Commonwealth Futures is to help communities plan and implement long term strategies that will reduce the rates at which youth drop out of school and that will enable disadvantaged youth to become economically self-sufficient. The longer-term goal will be to develop a planning format for local communities that will enable a community to submit a single, coordinated application for state assistance on the dropout issue and receive a single, coordinated state response.

-- Commonwealth Futures
Planning Grant Application
May 3, 1986

UD 025 477

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COMMONWEALTH FUTURES

FINAL REPORT
ON THE
SIX MONTH PLANNING GRANT

I. PROJECT SUMMARY

A year has passed since December 11, 1985, when the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Youth Coordinating Council voted to accept the challenge set forth by the McConnell Clark Foundation. A planning group was created which began with enthusiasm and energy to design an initiative for "at-risk" youth which would be:

- the result of joint collaboration between the Department of Education, Office of Training and Employment Policy, and as many other state agencies as possible;
- planned locally under the auspices of Private Industry Councils;
- designed to provide comprehensive services within local schools to potential dropouts and young people making the transition to work; and
- supported by a variety of funding sources that are leveraged with relatively small amounts of funds from the McConnell Clark Foundation.

From these beginnings, Commonwealth Futures was born. At the close of the six month planning period, Futures has exhibited a brief but impressive history. All six month outcomes, as follows, have been accomplished.

- An interagency Steering Committee and Work Group have been established to advise and assist the project.
- 24 communities were identified and invited to participate in a conference and program application process.
- Six communities were selected to attend an Institute and begin a comprehensive local planning process.
- An interagency RFP/Comprehensive Plan format has been developed.
- Initial local planning has been completed, resulting in the submission of comprehensive community plans which will be funded with $495,000 in reallocated state funds beginning January 1, 1987.

It is the major activities of the fall quarter (October-December) -- the conference, application process, community selection, and the Institute -- which have resulted in comprehensive, community-wide service plans from six communities which detail how the McConnell Clark jobs program objectives will be met (see Community Summaries, attached).

II. ACTIVITIES

First Quarter:

- The McConnell Clark Board of Trustees endorsed a six-month planning grant in early July. Staff were hired immediately by the project's Work Group and began work on July 15th. Albert McMahill, formerly staff director of the Boston Compact, serves as Director. Terry Grobe, formerly a staff member in the State Department of Education, is Assistant Director.

- The Commonwealth Futures Steering Committee, composed of the Chair of the Youth Coordinating Committee, the Governor's Special Assistant on Education, the Commissioner of Education and the Secretaries of Human Services and Economic Affairs was established and provides policy direction.

- The Futures initiative was located within the Governor's Office of Educational Affairs, under the direction of Robert Schwartz, Assistant to the Governor.

- The project's Work Group (a subcommittee of the state's Youth Coordinating Council and composed of representatives from the Department of Education, Office of Training and Employment Policy, Youth Services, Social Services, Employment Security, and Public Welfare) began meeting weekly to advise and assist staff, to review state policies and practices, and to work with local communities.

- A comprehensive work plan keyed to a half dozen critical six month outcomes was created and endorsed by the Work Group and Steering Committee.

- The formal announcement of Futures was made by Governor Dukakis on September 3rd, in a speech at the international "Futures for Youth" conference which was attended by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and nearly a hundred international, national, and local business leaders and experts in the field of youth services.

- Twenty-four eligible communities were identified by the Work Group using a combination of state agency data bases indicating poverty, dropout rates, and educational disadvantage.

- A project Information Booklet, Program Application, and multi-volume Resource Kit were developed and circulated statewide.

- A Commonwealth Futures conference was designed as a first step to involve as many potential participants as possible in state and community planning.

- Personal invitations were mailed by the Governor to the political, business, and educational leadership of the 24 Massachusetts communities containing the highest concentrations of youth considered to be "at-risk", requesting that they assemble a team representing the interests of business, schools, local government, and community-based human service agencies and bring them to a conference in Worcester.

- Four hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars in reallocated state funds were set aside to support local Futures initiatives beginning in January 1987. (In short, $75,000 in McConnell Clark dollars has already "leveraged" $495,000 for Futures).

Second Quarter:

- The Information and Technical Assistance Conference was held in Worcester on October 2nd. More than 150 local leaders responded to the Governor's invitation and heard his keynote address and remarks by the Steering Committee before discussing the details of the Futures initiative.

- In mid-October, a system was developed to identify those communities most prepared to begin development of coordinated local plans. A "readiness" Futures Program Application was developed and circulated to the communities which had expressed interest and identified planning teams. A review process was designed which included relevant review instruments and instructions.

- A Review Team (composed of members of the Project Work Group, the State Youth Coordinating Council and others) was formed to review community applications which were submitted to the Governor's Office on October 17.

- Nine semi-finalists were selected on October 21, and nine hour-long interviews with community teams were held on October 30 and 31.

- Six first round participants (Brockton, Chelsea, Fall River, Lawrence, Pittsfield, and Boston) were selected by the Steering Committee on November 7.

- A Comprehensive Community-Wide Service Plan format and appropriate instructions were developed by the Work Group in October. These documents also functioned as a "request for proposal" to access the reallocated funds committed by the Department of Education and the Office of Training and Employment Policy.

- An intensive, three-day Planning and Development Institute for the six communities was held at Brandeis University on November 18-20. The Institute was designed to help communities develop their comprehensive plans and to share ideas among the participating cities.

- Continued planning in the six communities during November and December was supported with on-site technical assistance from staff and consultants. Final plans were submitted to the Governor's Office on December 12th (an example from Lawrence is included with this report).

- The Work Group and Steering Committee approved the local plans on December 17 and 18.

- A one million dollar appropriation for Commonwealth Futures has been requested in the FY'88 state budget. This will be coupled with proposed Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and other state agency funding, and directed to support of state level and community-based activities.

- Futures will be highlighted in the Governor's State of the State inaugural address in January, in which he will indicate that dropout prevention will be one of four priorities for his next Gubernatorial term.

The planning phase involved the Steering Committee, the Work Group, staff, and several communities in a very intense and complex process. Our experience demonstrated that Commonwealth Futures requires an unprecedented level of coordination and concentrated attention at both the state and the local level. Moreover, we learned that consistent vision and a good deal of trust is required, since independent work must go on at both levels and in different departments and governmental units. At the same time, all these independent efforts must be shaped into an integrated set of objectives. To date Commonwealth Futures has required -- and has received -- unparalled cooperation at all levels. The long-range objectives of Futures are ambitious but with the same degree of commitment that has characterized the planning

phase, six communities can implement a wide variety of strategies to serve at risk youth, additional communities can be invited to join the initiative, and state agencies can institute the changes necessary to facilitate comprehensive planning and joint programming at the local level.

III. PROBLEMS/SUCCESSES

Two problems developed during the second quarter which have now been successfully resolved. The first developed in Pittsfield, one of Futures' first-round communities. Two members of the local school committee raised belated objections to the initial application, calling the plan a "disaster" which would "label" children as early school failures and which would create "pull-out or tracking" programs. Several weeks of debate ensued during which approval of the comprehensive plan and program director job description were tabled. However, on December 17, the school committee voted 5-2 to approve Pittsfield's plan.

Another problem involved securing "bridge funds" for staff while awaiting approval of an operational grant from McConnell Clark. Although the Steering Committee had raised $495,000, these funds could not be used for administrative costs, because of existing state and federal regulations. Therefore, these funds will be used solely to support planning/development and implementation activities in the six communities and other fund sources will be needed to support Futures staff. At this point, money has been committed through the Department of Social Services and negotiations are in process to move the money and secure staff contracts. However, because of the delay in resolving the staff salary problem, clear signals to communities about the exact amount of initial grants were not given and this resulted in some confusion and frustration on the part of first-round community teams.

Again, the successes of the project in its first six months have been impressive and on-going. The Worcester conference was attended by 150 people and all 24 invited communities sent representatives. Despite the fact that communities had only two weeks in which to develop and submit applications, fourteen applications were received and reviewed. A majority of the applications were very strong, indicating to the Review Team that the project

had "struck a chord" in local communities and that more than five communities could exhibit "readiness" to address and revolve the problem. The Review Team and Steering Committee found the selection of communities a difficult task and, indeed, finally chose six instead of five first-round communities.

The Planning and Development Institute, held at Brandeis University November 18-20 was instrumental in educating teams about the project and the planning process and in providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and program strategies. At the Institute, 4-5 member teams from the six selected communities received further information and funding clarification from the Governor's Education Advisor and the Chairman of the state Youth Coordinating Council, heard implementation ideas from the New York City Director of Cities-in-Schools, participated in the case study of the highly successful ET Choices program and applied the lessons from that effort to both state and local Futures goals. In addition, teams worked individually on their comprehensive plans, shared information and concerns with the Steering Committee and Work Group and articulated a set of concerns that will guide the work of the project over the next six months.

During late November and early December, three consultants were hired to assist the core staff. They were assigned to communities and worked closely with planning teams to finalize the comprehensive plans. These plans were submitted to the Governor's Office on December 12, discussed by the Steering Committee on December 17, and approved pending technical review by the Work Group. The plans were then reviewed by the Work Group on December 18 and a list of concerns and comments communicated to planning team chairs the week of December 23.

IV. PROJECTED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER

During the next three months, a number of objectives and related activities must be accomplished. These are, as follows:

Objective One: Develop an expanded Memorandum of Agreement which involves Economic Affairs, Education and Human Services.

Activities:

- Schedule and hold Steering Committee meeting(s)
- Re-work existing MOA
- Approve final document (Steering Committee)

Objective Two: Develop new or expanded roles for the Work Group and Youth Coordinating Council regarding the project.

Activities:

- Hold Work Group meetings to discuss issue
- Discuss and finalize YCC role in regular meetings

Objective Three: Support and facilitate continued planning and technical assistance in the six Futures communities

Activities:

- Participate in Governor's Conference on January 17 (staff and team from Lawrence)
- Meet regularly with teams in all first-round communities (staff and consultants)
- Discuss and finalize with teams six month technical assistance plans
- Assist in securing consultants and other resources as needed
- Work with Regional Educational Laboratory to offer technical assistance services to first-round or potential second-round communities

Objective Four: Create a plan to organize regional state agency teams to assist Futures communities

- Meet with Futures Work Group to develop plan
- Coordinate interested regional staff through Work Group members

Objective Five: Develop a single set of reporting criteria and format

Activities:

- Create a sub-committee of Work Group and local team members
- Approve final reporting process (Steering Committee)

Objective Six: Secure funding for Futures communities in the FY 1988 state budget

Activities:

- Organize local events for state representatives/senators
- Other activities as appropriate

V. DISCUSSION OF PLANNING GRANT PERIOD

Commonwealth Futures has had a major impact, both on the state and the local level, in its first six months of operation. At the state level, McConnell Clark funds have already leveraged nearly half a million dollars to address dropout and reentry issues. In addition, the project has raised the awareness of this serious social issue across state agencies. The Steering Committee and Work Group have found it advantageous to address a single concern in a coordinated manner, and this sense of appropriateness and optimism has resulted in a good deal of interagency work being accomplished in a relatively short period of time. Indeed, the project shows promise of being an ideal vehicle with which to develop new levels of interagency coordination and cooperation.

On the local level, Futures has also raised awareness of the dropout issue and has drawn interest from broad constituencies in most of the cities and towns in Massachusetts. Communities which were not chosen for the first-round have indicated that the planning process dictated by the initial application was so helpful that it brought people together and inspired interest in continuing the planning process even without first-round support. The six first-round communities have completed comprehensive plans which will guide implementation activities over the next eighteen months and will be used to involve other local parties and leverage additional state, local and federal funds for the dropout effort.

As communities begin implementation and are able to measure success, creative models of education, work experience and job preparation will be shared with other communities across the state. Also, as more effective in-school programs for at-risk youth are developed, these models will begin to change the traditional way that schools "do business" and will result in schools and communities serving all of its youth more effectively.